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DELHI, DHAKA SIGN AGREEMENTS FOR MARITIME COOPERATION, RAILWAYS

Sheikh Hasina's India visit saw her signing agreements in oceanography, health, medicine, disaster relief, digital, green partnership

CONSERVATION OF TEESTA IN BANGLADESH

"Fifty-four shared rivers connect India and Bangladesh. We have been cooperating on flood management, early warning, drinking water projects. We have decided to start negotiations at the technical level for the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after summit talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina | P9

DHAKA'S ARMED FORCES TO BE MODERNISED

- India's push to help Bangladesh in Teesta comes as China has also shown interest in the project. Sheikh Hasina is going on a state visit to China soon
- Both the nations agreed to strengthen cooperation in defence. India will help Bangladesh in the modernisation of its armed forces and increase engagement on counter terrorism, de-radicalisation, border management

10 times

NARENDRA MODI AND SHEIKH HASINA HAVE MET SINCE 2019

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

NTA head rolls; NEET-PG on hold

CBI probe ordered into NEET-UG paper leak; ex-ISRO chief heads panel to clean up NTA

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR & KETAN NAROTTAM TANNA @ New Delhi

Congress activists protest over the alleged irregularities in NEET-UG results, in Kolkata | PTI

WITH its credibility at stake amid continuing protests over irregularities in holding the NEET-UG, the government on Saturday took a flurry of decisions, sacking the head of the National Testing Agency (NTA) that conducted the exam, forming a panel to reform the NTA, ordering a CBI probe into the NEET-UG mess and putting the NEET-PG on hold. The NEET-PG was scheduled to be conducted on Sunday.

In a late night announcement, the Ministry of Education said it has decided to assign the probe into the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG held on May 5 to the CBI.

Ever since the NEET-UG results were announced on June 4, there were charges of malpractices, including cheating and impersonation in the exam, which is the single-window entry point for medical course in the country.

When a couple of days ago, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan called out the NTA for systemic failure, it was clear that its chief Subodh Kumar Singh was on the chopping block. Singh was replaced by former home secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola, a retired IAS officer of the 1985 batch. Kharola was considered as a tough task master during his tenure in service.

The Appointment Committee of Cabinet, while approving Kharola's appointment as the new NTA head, placed Singh in waiting for posting in the department of personnel, public grievance and pension till further orders.

Parallelly, the Union Health Ministry decided to postpone the NEET-PG as a "precautionary measure". The Ministry of Health said it has decided to undertake a thorough assessment of the robustness of processes of the NEET-PG entrance examination conducted by NTA for medical students.

The day began with Centre announcing the setting up of a high-level panel of seven experts, led by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan, to review the NTA's performance and suggest course corrections. Its terms of reference are: reforming the exam process, improving data security protocols, and enhancing the structure and functioning of the NTA. P9

States raise issue of borrowing limit in pre-budget meeting

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

OPPOSITION-ruled states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala on Saturday raised the issue of borrowing limits imposed by the Centre depriving them of necessary funds leading to liquidity crunch.

In a pre-budget consultation with the Centre here, Kerala finance minister K N Balgopalan requested that a special package of at least ₹24,000 crore be announced in the Union budget 2024-25 to tid e over the current liquidity stress the state is facing due to borrowing limits imposed by the Centre. Tamil Nadu finance minister Thangam Thenarasu pointed out that because of the Centre's diktat the state lost ₹8,500 crore of borrowing space over the last four years. In the meeting, most state finance ministers stressed the need for more funds for improvement of infrastructure in their respective states.

Kerala's finance minister highlighted the urgent need for a special capital investment of ₹5,000 crore for the state for fulfilling its part in the development of the Vizhinjam International Mother Port and the Port region. He sought another ₹5,000 crore for financing certain other infrastructure projects such as the 'Tunnel Road link between Calicut and Wayanad'. Odisha deputy chief minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo sought dedicated budget allocations and resources for large-scale infrastructure projects, such as industrial parks and corridors, electricity grids and railway infrastructure. Chhattisgarh finance minister O P Choudhary demanded financial assistance for the development of the state capital region — Nava Raipur — as an industrial hub.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman told the media that on the issue of devolution of taxes, most finance ministers agreed to raise the issue at the finance commission.

Release ₹5,300 cr for UBP: K'taka to Centre

The State Government has requested the Centre to release Rs 5,300 crore announced earlier for the Upper Bhadra Project and declare it as a national project. On behalf of CM Siddaramaiah, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda presented the State Government's views at the pre-budget meeting held by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman P4

HC prohibits BTC from conducting races, betting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

ACTING on an appeal by the state government, the High Court of Karnataka on Saturday prohibited Bengaluru Turf Club (BTC) Limited from conducting on-course and off-course racing and betting events.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice KV Aravind passed this interim order upholding the decision of the government to reject an application seeking license submitted by BTC to conduct racing and betting events.

The bench said the interim order issued on June 18 by a single judge permitting BTC to conduct racing and betting events stands suspended and stayed, subject to the outcome of the petitions challenging the rejection of license pending before him.

On June 6, the government rejected BTC's application seeking license to conduct racing and betting events from April 2024 to August 2024 citing several alleged irregularities in the club.

The bench observed that the discretion to refuse licence could be said to be an exercise, on all prima facie considerations, used reasonably well based on relevant factors. When the discretion was properly exercised by the state, there was no prima facie case for the petitioners -- Bengaluru Turf Club and others -- to seek any interim relief granted by the single judge, the bench said.

Khandre stalls HDK's first nod as Union Min to allow mining in Sandur

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

THE first file that was signed by **HD Kumaraswamy** soon after taking charge as Union minister of steel and heavy industries in the NDA government on June 12, has been stalled by Karnataka's forest, ecology and environment department minister **Eshwar B Khandre**.

The file that has been stalled pertains to mining permission to Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to take up iron ore mining in Devadari Hills of Swamimalai forest, in Sandur, Ballari, in 401.5761 hectares of virgin forest land.

On June 21, Khandre signed a letter and sent it to forest, environment and ecology department and to the Company stating that no forest clearance for mining in Sandur would be given to KIOCL till the company implements the Central Empowered Committee guidelines and gets clearances for environmental violations by KIOCL in Kudremukh. The signed letter was made public on June 22.

A department official said: "When KIOCL was mining in Kudremukh, many violations took place. The company had increased the height of Lakya dam's catchment area by one metre due to which forest submersion area had increased. They had laid pipes to transport iron ore to Mangaluru, without obtaining forest permission. Mining dues are also yet to be cleared. So now it has been decided that unless forest clearance for anomalies related to forest act and mining in Kudremukh are not cleared, no mining permission in Sandur will be given." P4

Malur mutt seer beaten to death, three arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolar

CHINMAYANANDA Swamiji, 70, of Ananda Marga Mutt at Mylanda Halli near Malur in Kolar district was allegedly beaten to death by three people, including two seers of the mutt, on Saturday morning. Police gave the names of the arrested as Arun Kumar, 55, Acharya Dharmananda Avadhoot, 45, and Acharya Praneshwar, 48.

Kolar SP M Narayana, who visited the mutt, told *TNSE* that preliminary investigations revealed that some civil and administrative disputes in the mutt led to the seer's murder.

Narayana said Chinmayananda Swamiji, who went to the toilet around 6 am, was allegedly attacked by Acharya Dharmananda and Acharya Praneshwar with sticks. Later, they dragged him out when Arun Kumar, a mutt employee, joined them and assaulted the seer.

People living near the mutt rushed to the spot and shifted the seer to a hospital in Malur. As the seer's condition deteriorated, he was shifted to RL Jalappa Medical College Hospital Hospital where he died. Sources said the head office of the mutt is in Kolkata. The mutt ran several educational institutions till 2012 when they were closed because of several disputes.

EXPRESS READ

Writer Nadoja Kamala Hampana passes away

Bengaluru: Kannada writer and scholar Nadoja Dr Kamala Hampana passed away at her daughter's house in Bengaluru on Saturday morning. Dr Kamala was 89. She is survived by her husband Prof Hampa Nagarajaiah, two daughters and a son P6

Cong govt in K'taka will fall soon: Somanna

Bengaluru: Union Minister of State for Railways and Jal Shakti V Somanna has predicted that the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka will not last much longer and former chief minister and Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries HD Kumaraswamy may know exactly when it will crumble P6

Conciliatory tone at GST meet

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chairs the GST Council meet on Saturday | PTI

IN her first GST Council meeting after assuming the role of finance minister in the new government, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was in a conciliatory mood as she reiterated that the Central government does not intend to send GST notices to businesses left, right and centre.

"I want to reassure assessees that our intent is to make the GST assessees' life easier. We are working towards less and less compliances," she said at the fag end of the press briefing called to announce the decisions made in the 53rd GST Council.

To buttress her point, she underlined that the Central GST department has sent notices to only 1,14,939 assessees, or 1.96% of the total 58.63 lakh active assesses till 31 December 2023. "Our intention is to make it easier and simpler, less cumbersome," she added.

The same conciliatory tone was reflected in the GST Council decisions as it decided in favour of taxpayers in many ongoing thorny issues, including introducing the sunset clause for anti-profiteering provisions, exemption of GST on corporate guarantees, and reducing the amount of pre-deposit for filing of appeals under GST. The Council also decided to exclude Extra Neutral Alcohol used for manufacture of alcoholic liquor for human consumption under the ambit of GST.

Some of the decisions would directly impact the common man. The Council decided to exempt some services provided by the Railways, such as sale of platform tickets, facility of retiring rooms/waiting rooms, cloak room services and battery-operated car services.

To benefit students living in hostel accommodations outside the premises of educational institutes, the Council decided to exempt accommodation services from GST where the monthly rent per person is up to ₹20,000. Such benefits would be available subject to the condition that the accommodation is supplied for a minimum continuous period of 90 days.

To deal with fake invoicing, the Council decided to roll out nationwide Aadhaar-based authentication of registered taxpayers in a phased manner.

It also decided to implement a uniform rate of 12% on all milk cans (of steel, iron and aluminium) irrespective of their use. The GST rate on carton, boxes and cases of both corrugated and non-corrugated paper or paper-board has been reduced from 18% to 12%.

SPORTING LIFE

Sports help refugees build bridges, integrate into society

INDRANEEL DAS @ Chennai

Sunday Special

THIRTY-SIX athletes with as many tales training in 12 disciplines, hosted by 15 countries representing more than 120 million displaced people across the world. All unified through sport. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Refugee Olympic Team is not just a team, it's an amalgamation of myriad emotions, stories of resilience and hope.

The sentiments echoed by the team's chef de mission, Masomah Ali Zada, during an interaction with this newspaper highlighted the beauty of sport and its role in helping athletes integrate into society. Her words were at times John Lennonesque: 'there is no country or religion too...'

"I am so lucky to be chef the mission of a team that's from different cultures, speaks different languages," she said. "I suffered a lot of discrimination because of my nation and of my ethnicity... We are from different countries. The Olympic Games is the moment they will realise their dream."

Masomah, who was forced to flee Afghanistan for pursuing her passion, cycling, because of the Taliban government's hostilities towards women playing sport, said the only thing that kept each of them sane while waiting for endless paperwork was sport. "When we arrive in a new country, we have to wait for paperwork and it's a long process. During this period, we cannot do anything. We cannot learn the language. We don't have access to education so we wait. Sport is the only possibility that helps refugees to just pass the time and wait. Most refugees in this period try to play a sport, also to remain healthy, mentally and physically."

Masomah felt despite athletes not representing a country, refugees have the right to compete at the Olympic Games. "They have a lot of talent. They just need a chance. I know that it's really difficult to be a refugee, but still, we have to keep going. We have a right to live and dream and thanks to the Olympic team that allows refugees to be part of international competition like Olympics."

She said how despite getting teased and stoned while cycling in Afghanistan and even while in France as a refugee she continued to dream. Finally, in Tokyo Olympics she realised it when she represented the refugee team. Living a dream amidst the spirit of inclusion and inspiration. P13

Darshan sent to high-security barrack in Bengaluru prison

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

ACTOR **Darshan Thoogudeepa** and his accomplices D Dhanaraj alias Raju, V Vinay and S Pradush were on Saturday remanded in judicial custody till July 4.

They were sent to Bengaluru central prison at Parappana Agrahara. The Under Trial Prisoner (UTP) number of Darshan is 6106. He is reportedly kept in a high security barrack in the prison.

The four accused were produced before a city court by Vijaynagar sub-division police investigating the Renukaswamy murder case as their police custody ended on Saturday.

Thirteen other accused were remanded in judicial custody on Thursday. The special public prosecutor (SPP) appealed to the court to shift some of them to Tumakuru jail as there are chances of an attack on them by fellow accused and fans of Darshan in Bengaluru central prison. P5